

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

Claim 1-17 (cancelled)

Claim 18 (new): A method for releasing a slug adhering to a stamp in a punching machine, by carrying the stamp, after performing a punching operation on a sheet material, with the active stroke at least partially through a cutting opening in a cutting plate supporting the sheet material, and carrying the stamp during the return stroke back again through the cutting opening in the cutting plate which close-fittingly encloses the stamp, wherein the cutting opening functions during the return stroke such that the side of the cutting plate remote from the sheet material engages around the cutting opening as a scraping edge on the slug adhering to the stamp and releases it from the stamp.

Claim 19 (new): The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein the stamp is carried through the cutting opening in the cutting plate during the punching operation such that the periphery of the slug adhering to the stamp is released over only a part of the periphery from the cutting plate.

Claim 20 (new): The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein the stamp is carried through the cutting opening in the cutting plate during the punching operation such that the periphery of the slug adhering to the stamp is wholly released from the cutting plate.

Claim 21 (new): The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein the return stroke of the stamp is continued so far that the cutting opening in the cutting plate and the sheet material are left clear by the stamp.

Claim 22 (new): The method as claimed in claim 21, wherein after the sheet material has been left clear by the stamp, the processed sheet material is removed from the cutting plate.

Claim 23 (new): The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein a sheet material for processing is placed on the cutting plate before commencing the punching operation.

Claim 24 (new): The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein the slug released from the stamp is discharged.

Claim 25 (new): A punching machine for releasing a slug adhering to a stamp, comprising:

a cutting plate provided with at least one cutting opening,  
at least one stamp for linear intermittent displacement which is displaceable between a position in which the cutting opening in the cutting plate is left clear by the stamp and a position in which the stamp is carried through the cutting opening, and  
wherein the stamp passes close-fittingly through the cutting opening of the cutting plate,  
wherein the cutting opening in the cutting plate has a scraping edge for releasing the slug adhering to the stamp.

Claim 26 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein the free space between the stamp and the associated cutting plate in the position where the stamp is carried through the cutting opening is smaller than 0.02 mm.

Claim 27 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein the cutting plate is adapted to support a material layer for processing, and the edge of the cutting opening on the side remote from the side supporting the material layer is sharp.

Claim 28 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein the edge of the cutting opening on the side remote from the side supporting the material layer at least locally encloses an angle with a cutting edge of the stamp.

Claim 29 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein the cutting plate is supported by a punch plate with a passage for the slug connecting onto the cutting opening in the cutting plate, which passage is larger than the cutting opening.

Claim 30 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 29, wherein the punch plate supports a plurality of separate cutting plates.

Claim 31 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 29, wherein the cutting plate is connected releasably to the punch plate.

Claim 32 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein suction means connect onto the cutting opening for discharge of the slug.

Claim 33 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein blowing means connect onto the cutting opening for discharge of the slug.

Claim 34 (new): The punching machine as claimed in claim 25, wherein the punching machine comprises drive means for the linear intermittent displacement of the stamp.